

# **Testimony of Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby Chairman, Native American Cultural and Educational Authority**

## **Before the House Committee on Resources**

**October 17, 2001**

It is a pleasure to provide testimony to this Committee relating to House Resolution 2742, authorizing the construction of a Native American Cultural Center and Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Before I begin my comments, please allow me this opportunity to extend sincere appreciation for being allowed to have input into this Committee's work. The task of the Committee is not an easy one, but it is indeed an important one.

Preservation of cultures is a task which is incumbent upon all of us. As the United States of America is a true melting pot of cultures and peoples from all over the earth, preserving those various cultures provides us with a glimpse of where we have been, and details the possibilities and potential goals for where we are going as a united people.

The Oklahoma Native American Cultural Center and Museum will provide an opportunity to showcase the cultures of the 39 Native American tribes which call Oklahoma "home." Operating in an international, national, state and local context of cultural centers and museums, the center and museum will provide exposure to the unique cultures and histories of the forebears of this great land. That exposure will be provided to people from all walks of life, from all over the planet.

Throughout the United States there is a growth in Native American cultural institutions, as Native Americans and their governments reclaim their own histories and cultural patrimony. In 1990, when Congress adopted the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, directing federal institutions to return objects of cultural patrimony to tribes, a great breath of enthusiasm and hope was breathed into the efforts of the tribes to gather, protect and preserve their various, unique cultures and identities.

Since 1990, museums across the country have been working with tribes to return collections or to negotiate agreements for the care, handling and display of collections which present the various tribal histories. More and more, tribes are taking ownership of what has been taken from them, and are creating their own institutions to tell their special stories. Within Oklahoma alone, there are more than 20 institutions and organizations responsible for presenting to the public the histories and cultures of select tribal peoples, preserving objects of cultural patrimony or carrying out research. Yet, magnanimous as those effort might be, they lack cohesion in presenting the overall picture.

The state government, through its tourism campaigns, calls Oklahoma, "Native America." The history of the state is inextricably woven into the recent histories of the 39 tribes in Oklahoma. Each of those tribes has contributed not only to the overall development of Oklahoma, but to America as well. Because most of the tribes which are now located in Oklahoma were removed here by the federal government, the story must be told of how the Indian people acclimated themselves to their new home. The story must be told of how, out of many, one was born.

The Native American Cultural Center and Museum will serve as a satellite institution. It will complement and connect other institutions through programming and tribal-initiated cultural tourism activities. It will tell

the story from the perspective of the tribes and through the eyes of those peoples, exposing all visitors to a history which has never, not ever, been gathered into one, central location.

I ask the Committee to also note that the Native American Cultural and Educational Authority is in joint application with the Oklahoma Historical Society State Museum of History to become a Smithsonian Affiliate. This realization would present an outstanding opportunity for the Cultural Center to become a "Smithsonian of the Midwest." Through this partnership, the Cultural Center would be able to borrow collections from and draw upon the considerable professional and museological resources of both institutions. The Cultural Center will have a unique role in this evolving context of cultural institutions, primarily as a partner and collaborator with the tribes and other cultural institutions in preserving and nurturing cultural aspects such as language, telling the stories to a broad audience and protecting cultural patrimony.

The tribes are very much in support of this effort. We endorse the proposal for the Oklahoma Native American Cultural Center and Museum, and urge the members of this Committee to also endorse making this concept a reality.

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to provide these comments. I wish you every success in the tasks which lie before you. Your consideration of House Resolution 2742 will be appreciated, not only by Native America and the great state of Oklahoma, but by all who will visit this magnificent facility. Thank you.